

Life Is Beautiful

April is such a beautiful month in England as flowers suddenly spring up everywhere and trees that have slept all winter wake up and burst into leaf. As I write this, a tree just outside my window is finally turning green, and gazing at it from time to time as I write this is really lifting my spirits.



But sadly, even in this most gorgeous season, most people I know seem to be more stressed than joyful. So many of us now dash around all day long like headless chickens without ever stopping to see the beauty all around us. This is a totally unnecessary tragedy. So this month, I want to really encourage you to take plenty of time out from your busy schedule to appreciate the beauty and bounty of life.

I know that when I say life is beautiful, you may feel like telling me off, because as you see it, this world is choc-a-bloc with terrible pain and suffering. But I promise you that I am very aware of all the endless suffering in our world. I sometimes even choose to read harrowing accounts of the Holocaust or the Soviet Gulags to remind myself to be a witness to the incredibly deep suffering of humankind throughout the ages.

Nevertheless, I now make a conscious choice every day to notice beauty, love and kindness all around me because doing so assists me to keep my mind focussed on the reality of love, rather than the dream of hatred and conflict that fills our nightly news and daily newspapers.

One thing I have learnt over nearly three decades of pretty constant spiritual training is that complaining about the state our world is in, or even worrying about it, helps no-one. Billions of human beings are angry with the world, and billions more are frightened by the world they live in, and nothing seems to change for the better. It is almost as though we all believe that if we get angry or fearful enough, everything we hate about our world will somehow disappear. Sadly, our endless anger and fear do nothing to change the world. They just end up weakening us, and even making us sick, because the energy attached to anger and fear is so dark and debilitating.

One of the most helpful practices that we can do for our own well-being and for the benefit of the whole world is to practise noticing all that is going really well in our lives, instead of focussing on what is going wrong. For example, we can just pause for a second or two before we eat a meal to give thanks for all the delicious, nutritious food we are about to eat. When we are walking down the street, we can silently give thanks that we have two legs that work so well, or we can pause and really appreciate the trees or the blue sky on the horizon.

Practising true gratitude for all that we have like this on a daily basis is a wonderfully easy and effective way to turn our attention to all that is good and beautiful in our universe. What we focus on is what we get, so as we focus on counting our blessings, we will actually begin to receive more and more blessings in our lives!

Practising being grateful for all the many good aspects of our life can also counteract our innate biological tendency towards flight or fight – worrying about the future or being angry about a grievance from our past.

I do not mean this in a judgemental way, but unhappy individuals tend to be pretty self-centred. They are so absorbed in their own woes, that they really do not have much time or energy to support other individuals who are having a hard time in this challenging world. When I was a young woman, I was extremely neurotic, and looking back at that time in my life with hindsight, I can now see how selfish I was in my misery. But now that I have trained myself to be a much happier and calmer person, I notice that I quite naturally have more time and energy to ‘be there’ for others when they are going through a difficult time.

So I no longer believe that seeking happiness in our own lives is selfish. In fact, I truly believe that if we practise noticing all the many small things in our daily life that bring us joy, we can become a much more positive and available presence in the world, and we may even begin to spread a little joy wherever we go. One thing I have noticed about great spiritual masters, such as the Dalai Lama, is that they exude an exceptional inner joy. They do not seem to take themselves too seriously, and yet they work tirelessly and joyfully on behalf of suffering humanity.

These joy-ful spiritual masters are my heroes. I long to emulate them, and so I now practise being joy-ful on a daily basis. Unfortunately, there are still some days when I am basically a miserable, moody pain, and so I know that I still have an infinitely long way to go before I become a truly radiant, or even miraculous, presence in this world, like the great spiritual saints and bodhisattvas down the ages. But at least I now know that being happy is not just a self-centred ambition, but a core spiritual goal that we urgently need to can adopt on behalf of all suffering living beings. So please, this April, remember:

BE HAPPY!

Peggy Foster
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